



Sklepy cynamonowe / Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą?

Bruno Schulz

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The collected fiction of "one of the most original imaginations in modern Europe" (Cynthia Ozick)

Bruno Schulz's untimely death at the hands of a Nazi stands as one of the great losses to modern literature. During his lifetime, his work found little critical regard, but word of his remarkable talents gradually won him an international readership. This volume brings together his complete fiction, including three short stories and his final surviving work, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. Illustrated with Schulz's original drawings, this edition beautifully showcases the distinctive surrealist vision of one of the twentieth century's most gifted and influential writers.

Sklepy cynamonowe / Sanatorium pod Klepsydr? Details

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Author : Bruno Schulz

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Tristan says

“On Saturday afternoons I used to go for a walk with my mother. From the dusk of the hallway, we stepped at once into the brightness of the day. The passerby, bathed in melting gold, had their eyes half-closed against the glare, as if they were drenched with honey, upper lips were drawn back, exposing the teeth. Everyone in this golden day wore that grimace of heat—as if the sun had forced his worshippers to wear identical masks of gold. The old and the young, women and children, greeted each other with these masks, painted on their faces with thick gold paint; they smiled at each other's pagan faces—the barbaric smiles of Bacchus.”

A collection of Polish writer and artist Bruno Schulz' complete surviving fiction (two volumes, for which he provided his own illustrations). Sadly, a large portion of his work and correspondence (among which what was to be his masterpiece "The Messiah") has been declared lost since his execution by the Gestapo in 1942. What we do have however, is something rather wonderful.

Schulz' rich, lyrical, florid prose gives shape to a half-real, half-imagined childhood, imbued with a strong flavour of the fantastic and absurd. Schulz draws from various creation myths, legends and figures from religion, mythology and literature to craft a dreamworld that is wholly unique. Transformation, chaos, a sudden change from reality to unreality are frequently recurring themes. Strong associations with Kafka and Borges crop up.

His debut, the novella "The Street of Crocodiles" (1933) is my favourite, and it's certainly narrative-wise the more consistent one of the two. Just fantastic. Do read it in summer though. It will add tremendously to the experience, trust me.

"Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass" retains the former's exemplary prose style but doesn't quite reach the same heights as a whole. Some of the stories in it date from even before 1930, so it has a very loose, slightly uneven feel. Still very much worth it though, when you're in the right frame of mind.

With Schulz, I've learned it is best to just let the words flow over you, let him entrance you. Disregard any desire or need for plot. If you're fine with this, do seek it out.

Sini says

JUBELENDE HERLEZING VAN DE BRILJANTE, BAROKKE BRUNO SCHULZ

Het briljante, barokke en overdonderend originele werk van de Pool Bruno Schulz (1892-1942) is slechts een aantal honderden pagina's groot, en daar is ook nog veel van verloren gegaan. Het is ook nooit een wereldberoemde en veelgelezen schrijver geworden, want daarvoor is zijn proza te ongewoon en te buitensporig in zijn grilligheid. Maar hij heeft een aantal devote bewonderaars, zoals ik ook in een eerder stuk over zijn "Verzameld werk" als schreef. Vooral onder schrijvers: Isaac Bashevis Singer vond hem minstens zo groot als Kafka en Proust; Jonathan Safran Foer, David Grossman en Cynthia Ozick hebben

intrigerende Schulz- pastiches geschreven waarin leven, werk en stijl van de grote kleine Bruno op aanstekelijke wijze worden gecelebreerd; en een aantal jaren geleden schreef Maxim Biller nog een veelgeprezen novelle over de verloren briefwisseling tussen Schulz en Thomas Mann. De legendarische hoewel vrij onbekende experimentele filmer Wojciech Has maakte bovendien een even eigenzinnige als respectvolle verfilming van "Sanatorium Clepsydra", echt een prachtige film, die ik laatst voor mijn verjaardag kreeg. Geïnspireerd door die film herlas ik "De kaneelwinkels" en "Sanatorium Clepsydra", en ik was weer even overdonderd als alle eerdere keren dat ik dit werk las en herlas. Een gigant, die Schulz. Een van de weinige schrijvers wiens werk ik zonder aarzelen een 9.5 zou geven. Waarbij ik ook wel weet dat dit niet voor iedereen geldt, want veel lezers en literatuurlijfhebbers vinden Schulz al te ongewoon en al te exuberant-barok. Maar ik geniet buitensporig van zijn werk.

De werelden die Schulz ons voortvoert zijn zo ongewoon omdat alles daarin aan voortdurende verandering onderhevig is. "De substantie van de werkelijkheid is in voortdurende gisting, ontkieming, verborgen leven", aldus Schulz; "Er bestaan geen dode, vaste voorwerpen. Alles diffundeert buiten zijn grenzen, bestaat slechts kort in een bepaalde vorm en verlaat deze bij de eerste gelegenheid". De relatief eenvormige wereld die wij menen te zien, kijkend door onze conventionele en niet erg fantasievolle bril, is alleen schijnwerkelijkheid, zoals alle werkelijkheid alleen maskerade is, en de stabiliteit ervan is een illusie: de grillige tegenwerelden van Schulz' ongeremd barokke fantasie pogen te ontkomen aan die illusie, wat dan weliswaar een "universele ontgoocheling van de werkelijkheid" oplevert maar vooral ook een veel rijkere, veel meer pluriforme, en veel vrijere manier van kijken naar en genieten van de wereld in en buiten ons hoofd. De literaire fantasie is voor Schulz "een sonde die in het naamloze wordt neergelaten", en die "in de voormorele diepten [opereert], daar waar de waarde zich pas in statu nascendi bevindt". Hij associeert dat ook met "het geniale tijdperk" van de kindertijd, d.w.z. van de kinderfantasie die nog niet gehoorzaamt aan de conventies van de volwassene, en die de hele wereld nog als oneindig geschakeerde oermythe waarneemt: een mythologiserende kinderfantasie overigens die Schulz niet primair bij kinderen zoekt, maar bij kunstenaars die zijn "terug gerijpt" naar die verloren kindertijd, en als volwassene nieuwe verhoudingen hebben gevonden met die verloren oermythische wereld.

Dat alles ontvouwt zich op adembenemende wijze in de pluriforme verhalen van "De kaneelwinkels" en "Sanatorium Clepsydra". Beide boeken kun je lezen als verhaalbundels waarin de toch al onuitputtelijk rijke en grillige verhalen elkaar door hun onderlinge grillige resonanties nog verder verrijken; je kunt ze ook lezen als twee pluriforme romans of zelfs als een zich voortdurend barok vertakkende roman in twee delen. Metamorfoses vieren hoogtij: de vader van de ik-figuur, een even clowneske als ongehoord welsprekende fantast, verandert in meerdere vogels, in een groteske bromvlieg, in een kakkerlak en uiteindelijk zelfs in een schorpioen of kreeft. Hier toont zich Schulz' kennis van en bewondering voor Kafka, maar ook een essentieel verschil: ten eerste is het aantal metamorfoses bij Schulz vele malen groter, en waar Kafka in "Die Verwandlung" de metamorfose van mens in kever in vrij droge en zakelijke stijl beschrijft en de wereld rondom de mens-kever alledaags houdt (wat overigens prachtige contrasten oplevert), daar verlustigt Schulz zich juist in een wildgroei van barokke stijlpirouettes en metaforen en metamorfoseert de hele verhaalwereld met de metamorfoses mee. En de Kafkaëske "Unheimlichkeit", die er bij Schulz wel degelijk ook is, gaat bij Schulz wel sterk gepaard met een aanstekelijke vreugde en fascinatie voor de "voortdurende gisting" van de zo veelvormig-veranderlijke werkelijkheid. In het verhaal "Sanatorium Clepsydra" bijvoorbeeld bezoekt de hoofdpersoon, Jozef, zijn dode vader, Jakub, in een sanatorium dat gesitueerd is buiten de reguliere tijd zodat vader Jakub daarin wel en tegelijk niet voortleeft. Rondlopend in de voortdurend metamorfoserende droomsferen van het stadje rondom het sanatorium krijgt Jozef een pakje, met daarin een opvouwbare telescoop: bij het uitvouwen verandert dit apparaat in een auto, waarin Jozef een plein oprijdt. Vervolgens breekt er een onduidelijke gewapende opstand uit. Jozef gaat terug naar het sanatorium, maar wordt tegen gehouden door een eerder al beschreven vreeswekkend monsterachtige geketende hond, wiens ketting veel verder uitschuifbaar bleek dan hij eerder zag. Maar dan doet hij een verbijsterende ontdekking: "Ik had hem

nog nooit van zo dichtbij gezien en nu pas vallen mij de schellen van de ogen [...]. Het was een mens! Een mens aan een ketting, die ik in een vereenvoudigend, metaforisch en schematisch perspectief op onbevattelijke wijze voor een hond had aangezien. Begrijpt u me niet verkeerd. Het was een hond, absoluut, maar een hond in menselijke gedaante. De kwaliteit hond is een innerlijke kwaliteit, en kan zich even goed in menselijke als in dierlijke gedaante manifesteren". Vervolgens wordt dan beschreven hoe de persoon in kwestie, door zijn zwarte kleren en de "beschaafde vorm van zijn baard" voor een gestudeerd iemand zou kunnen doorgaan, zelfs voor de broer van de raadselachtige arts in het sanatorium, maar tegelijk door o.a. de horizontale rimpels op zijn lage voorhoofd weer eerder lijkt op een onstuimiger mens met duistere en explosieve hartstochten. "En juist hierin", zo vervolgt Schulz, "in die afgrondelijke passie, in die convulsieve verstijving van al zijn pezen, in de waanzinnige furie waarmee hij woest de punt van de op hem wijzende stok aanblafte - was hij voor honderd procent hond". Reeds deze korte en erg versimpelde samenvatting laat zien hoe het verhaal "Sanatorium Clepsydra" als een stroom droomachtige absurditeiten op de lezer afkomt, een totaal grillige stroom waarin deze hond- mens (deze volmaakt onbeslisbare gestalte die steeds tussen mens en hond in oscilleert) juist door zijn absurditeit prima past. Door zo te schrijven offreert Schulz ons naar mijn gevoel een "Unheimliche" uitvergroting van de willekeur en veranderlijkheid van de werkelijkheid: ook de ons bekende wereld hangt van veranderlijke denkwijzen, modes, ontwikkelingen en vormen aan elkaar, ook in de ons bekende werkelijkheid is veel onzeker en voorbijgaand en dubbelzinnig, ook wij ervaren kortom continu de "maskerade van de werkelijkheid" maar dan in gedempte vorm, en Schulz laat ons die maskerade veel scherper uitgetekend zien. Maar naast gevoelens van "Unheimlichkeit" roept dit bij mij ook associaties op met een fantasierijk en vreugdevol spelend kind, dat zich vol pret vergaapt aan een telescoop die een auto kan worden en aan een hond die mensachtig is en tegelijk een mens is die hondachtig is. En ik word redelijk euforisch van de gedachte dat "hond" ook gezien kan worden als een nog niet gedefinieerde innerlijke kwaliteit, die zich ook in mensen kan voordoen. Wat mij dan tot geïnspireerde dromen en filosofische mijmeringen aanzet over aard en waarde van die kwaliteit, en over de vele verschillende vormen die deze "kwaliteit" allemaal aan kan nemen in onze zo veelvormige wereld.

Soortgelijke effecten bereikt Schulz voortdurend. Bijvoorbeeld in de quasi-terloopse beschrijving van "door plotseling huilen misvormde gezichten, alsof met de eerste tranen hun mensenmasker losliet en de vormloze brij van hun huilende vlees ontblootte". Reeds een huilend gezicht is bij Schulz een metamorfose, een vertrekking van een gezicht waardoor het masker van de conventie wegvalt en uitzicht geopend wordt op iets radicaal nieuws en onbekends. En dat radicaal nieuwe opent zich soms ook in een geïmagineerd natuur tafereel : "Het hele bos leek door duizenden lichtjes geïllumineerd, door alle sterren die het decemberfirmament kwistig rondstrooide. De lucht ademde een geheime lente, een onzegbare reinheid van sneeuw en viooltjes". Ontroerend en inspirerend vind ik hier vooral de termen "geheime lente" en "onzegbare reinheid": termen die de kortstondigheid, fragiliteit en ongrijpbaarheid onderstrepen van de nieuwe perspectieven die Schulz op het spoor is. Wat ook naar voren komt in passages als: "Want er zijn dingen die zich niet helemaal, niet tot het einde toe kunnen voltrekken. Ze zijn te groot om in de gebeurtenis te passen, zijn te prachtig. Ze proberen alleen te gebeuren, proberen of de grond van de werkelijkheid ze kan dragen. En plots wijken ze terug, bang hun integrale bestaan in de gebrekkigheid van de verwerkelijking te verliezen". Ergens heeft Schulz het dan ook over "vreemde gedrochten, schepsels die vragen, schepsels die suggesties waren". Die terminologie past naar mijn gevoel precies bij de eerder door mij beschreven hond-mens in "Sanatorium Clepsydra": een schepsel als een suggestie, een vraag, een beeld van iets onbekends. Zoals ook de "geheime lente" en de "onzegbare reinheid" allen vragen en suggesties zijn, of namen van verschijnselen die "zich niet kunnen voltrekken", dat wil zeggen: die geen definitieve vorm krijgen in de ons bekende werkelijkheid. Maar juist dat maakt ze ook zo verbijsterend en oneindig fascinerend. En dat maakt ook Schulz barokke en grillige proza zo onuitputtelijk rijk: hij offreert ons het ene ongrijpbare beeld na het andere, en laat die beelden ook nog eens voortdurend metamorfoser en in elkaar verglijden zodat hij hun ongrijpbaarheid en veelvormigheid tot in het extreme vergroot, en juist daarmee nodigt hij ons uit om weer even contact te maken met het "geniale tijdperk" in onze fantasieloze burgermansborsten en ons voor even

met ongeremd enthousiasme over te geven aan een veelheid van volstrekt onbekende fantasiewerelden.

Ik citeer nu, ondanks mijn weemoed vanwege alles wat ik niet citeer, toch een van Schulz' vele naar mijn smaak prachtige alinea's. "Ten slotte brak het seizoen van de herfststormen aan. Die dag werd de hemel al vroeg geel en laat, tegen die achtergrond gemodelleerd in de matgrijzen van imaginaire landschappen, grote en nevelige woestenijen, die perspectivisch terugweken in steeds smallere coulissen van heuvels en glooiingen, steeds dicht op elkaar en steeds kleiner, tot hij ver naar het oosten plotseling afbrak als de golvende zoom van een opvliegend toneelstuk, en zijn tweede plan liet zien, een diepere hemel, een leegte van angstige bleekte, het bleke, geschrokken licht van de verste verte - kleurloos, waterhelder - waarmee die horizon als in een onherroepelijke roerloosheid eindigde en zich sloot. Als op de etsen van Rembrandt waren op zulke dagen onder dat streepje helderheid verre, microscopisch scherpe landen te zien, die zich - zonder overigens ooit gezien te worden - achter de horizon onder die heldere spleet van de hemel verhieven, badend in een helbleek en panisch licht, als opgestegen uit een ander tijdperk en een andere tijdrekening, als het beloofde land dat de smachtende volkeren slechts een ogenblik wordt getoond. In dat heldere miniatuurlandschap zag je met wonderlijke scherpheid hoe zich over een golvend en kronkelig spoor, nauwelijks zichtbaar in die verte, een spoortrein voortbewoog, met een warrelend zilverwit streepje rook, en in het heldere niets oploste". Veel mensen zullen dit loze barokke woordkunst vinden, maar ik vind het schitterend: fenomenaal hoe Schulz hele imaginaire werelden en beloofde landen laat opstijgen uit de waarneming van een gewone herfstige hemel, geweldig hoe hij die landschappelijke beelden laat versmelten met toneel en beeldende kunst, en even geweldig hoe die beelden steeds vervloeien in het niets en in het kunstmatige verzanden, en hoe zij juist daardoor onderstrepen dat zij zo radicaal anders zijn dan de zogenaamde stabiele werkelijkheidsbeelden die wij dagelijks menen te zien. Wij zien een herfstige lucht en anders niets: Schulz ziet een eindeloos epos dat zich voortdurend transformeert. Zoals Schulz ook hele mythische en kleurrijke werelden laat opstijgen uit een simpel postzegelalbum, of hele levende voortdurend metamorfoserende oerwouden ziet en hoort en ruikt bij het kijken naar de arabesken van een gewoon behangetje. En allerlei in die kamer gekweekte exotische en onbestaande vogelrassen, door de vader van de ik-figuur gekweekt als bewuste uitdaging van de fantasie aan de al te fantasieloze eenvormigheid van onze schepper, kwetteren dan rond in dat behang. Wij kijken kalmpjes door het raam, zien een werkelijkheid en vervelen ons. Schulz keek sidderend uit het raam, en raakte volkomen overweldigd door tafereelen die vele malen rijker en unheimlicher waren dan de werkelijkheid. En hij schreef ze nog op ook.

Wat heb ik genoten van Schulz toen ik hem in de jaren tachtig voor het eerst las. Wat heb ik van hem genoten toen ik in 1995 de sterk verbeterde vertaling van hem las in het "Verzameld Werk". Wat heb ik van hem genoten toen ik laatst "De kaneelwinkels en Sanatorium Clepsydra" herlas, geïnspireerd door de film van Wojciech Has. En wat zal ik weer uitbundig van hem genieten als ik hem over een aantal jaren opnieuw herlees.

Emma says

As someone who lived through the most turbulent times of the 20th Century, Bruno Schulz had a wealth of nightmare experiences to inform his writing. Yet he chose not to directly address contemporary horrors, instead creating a magical fictionalised world based on his hometown. His works are surreal and for me, at least, deeply unsettling. There's something about these simple stories taken to the extremes of wild imagination that leave me feeling off kilter, like I just saw through a doorway into another world, like ours but *not*. Knowing that Schulz was ultimately shot dead by a Nazi in 1942 walking back to his forced home in the Drohobycz Ghetto with a loaf of bread, adds a further element of unreality, his untimely murder representing the absolute antithesis of what our world should be like.

Schulz's words and imagery build and build in what feels like an unstoppable, tumbling wave, snatching everything in its path. But there's no other side, no crash, no release of pressure. Instead, the picture switches to something new and the tide comes in again. It's jagged and often list like, with an underlying musicality that makes you listen to yourself reading it, even if that's only in your own head. The book is hard going- Schulz's style is so dense, so layered, that the mind becomes lost in the constructed imagery and you find yourself reading the same section over and over again to see if you can discover the most significant meaning, often finding that each piece of information is offered as being equally as important as the last. I don't know any Polish so the only point I can make about the translation is that Madeline Levine has effectively maintained the flow and connectivity in stories that are wandering and evocative.

This is not a book to relax into, but anyone who enjoys Kafka will certainly find something here to love.

ARC via Netgalley

Daria says

Po przeczytaniu drugi raz, bez presji ze strony szko?y, uwielbiam Sklepy... jeszcze bardziej.

Isabelle says

Mocht iemand zeggen dat Bruno Schulz onder invloed van LSD, of een Poolse variant daarvan, schreef, dan zou me dat niet verbazen. Schulz beschrijft lagen van de werkelijkheid waar je met je normale, door de linkerhersen helft gedomineerde brein niet bij kan. Lagen waarin de dingen op een soort van moleculair betekenisniveau uiteenspatten en nieuwe verbindingen maken. Voor sommigen is het de kindertijd, die Schulz op deze wijze weer tot leven brengt. Mij voelt het toch eerder aan als geniale hallucinaties. Een boek als dit lezen is een vorm van mentale stretching en, zeker voor een schrijver, geestverruimend. Maar er zijn ook de handicaps. Dat ik dit noodgedwongen in vertaling moet lezen is voor een tekst als deze een grote handicap, onvoldoende inzicht in de toenmalige tijdsgeest is er een andere. Ik las deel één, De kaneelwinkels, dat destijds ook als een op zich staand volume verscheen. En ben nu even toch wel aan wat gemakkelijker verteerbare tekst toe.

Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says

See more of my book reviews on my blog, [Literary Flits](#)

It's only half way through March, but I am pretty confident that *Collected Stories* by Bruno Schulz is going to be my book of the month! I absolutely loved his rich language and gorgeously vivid descriptions, deep prose and frequently bizarre storylines. Originally written in the 1930s these stories have a sense of history about them. I could picture the unnamed town as Schulz's protagonist wends his way through its streets. Kafka is namedropped in the synopsis and I did notice ideas that could have been inspired by him, particularly in certain elements of Father's daily life which sometimes reminded me of *The Metamorphosis*. I was also reminded of the Daniil Kharms short story collection I read last year in the often absurd turns Schulz's stories take.

Although each story is essentially independent, repeated themes, characters and locations made reading this book feel more to me like reading a novel than a short story collection. Schulz focuses in particular on the changing seasons, his Father character's dementia and the daily routine of maid Adela. He notices the natural world in its urban setting, giving frequent chapters over to detailed descriptions of plant life, especially wild growing weeds. He also uses repetition of particular words and phrases to great effect in linking the stories. Motifs from one tale spring up again and again to reinforce ideas and impressions.

Bruno Schulz uses lots of words, writes beautifully dense prose and, to me at least, is all about atmosphere, description and character. I don't expect this book to appeal to readers who prefer action, tightly-plotted storylines and concise ideas. Instead this collection is more a slow-flowing river. There is a lot happening, but its obscured and you have to sit watching a while before you begin to move with the current. Personally I loved getting swept up and away!

"Forgotten by the great day, all the herbs, flowers and weeds multiplied luxuriantly and silently, gladdened by this pause that they could sleep though outside the margin of time, on the borders of the endless day. An immense sunflower, held up on a powerful stem and sick with elephantiasis, awaited in yellow mourning dress the final, sad days of its life, sagging beneath the excess growth of its monstrous corpulence. But the naive suburban bluebells and the modest little muslin flowers stood there helpless in their starched pink and white little shirts, with no understanding of the sunflower's great tragedy." (from *Collected Stories* by Bruno Schulz)

Erwin Maack says

"No momento em que minha atenção se afasta da ordem regular das linhas escritas e acompanha a complexidade movente que nenhuma frase pode conter ou exaurir, me sinto próximo de entender que, do outro lado das palavras, há algo que busca sair do silêncio, busca significar por intermédio da linguagem, como dando golpes no muro de uma prisão." Ítalo Calvino

Michael says

These stories are a fabulous blend of romantic animism partaking of all the senses, fantastical tall tales, and wacky philosophies, all usually rendered from a precocious child's perspective. His writing is distinctive and unique, but I appreciate how others reach for some kind of hybrid of Kafka, Calvino, and Borges to forge a comparative description. And I have no trouble imagining likely influences on the ornate gothic fantasies of Lovecraft, the fractured fairy tales of Angela Carter, and the alternative realities of China Mieville. I was already sensitized to the wonders of Schulz from references to his "Street of Crocodiles" in Nicole Kraus' "History of Love" and an epigram from it in Mieville's "The City and the City," but it took a wonderful review from Goodreads' friend Fionnuala to really make me hunger to read this author. Her extra attention to his eerie and comic drawings is definitely worth a side trip or revisit : *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories*.

My sense of the collection is best described in this late 19th century drawing by Heinrich Kley:

The author was a Polish-speaking Jew who lived his whole life in a small town in the Galicia region formerly

of the Polish Kingdom, then of the Austrian Empire, and then, after 1939, Ukraine. He worked as a school teacher and illustrator and took up writing as an extension of skills developed as a storyteller to tame his unruly students. He published but two slim volumes of stories in a life cut short by getting gunned down in the street by a Nazi in 1942, supposedly over a difference with another officer who kept him out of the local ghetto roundup for the camps in exchange for painting him a mural (see David Grossman's *Age of Genius: The Legend of Bruno Schulz*, *The New Yorker*, 2009). This edition of his work is a complete set of his collected stories and a few other pieces in a new translation by Univ. of North Carolina professor Medline Levine, who has previously tackled Czeslaw Milosz and two other Polish writers. This volume lacks the illustrations available in earlier editions of his work.

Schulz tales often feature an imaginative boy growing up in this small town with parents who ran a cloth store on the floor below their apartment, a family which resembles that of the author's. The father Jakub inspires the boy with his odd hobbies and obsessions with alternative visions of reality. The boom and bust of his business often leans to the latter, so the family is often close to poverty. But the boy has the world of books and the creative outlet of fantasy play with his friends in the neighborhood.

In the face of boring schoolwork and the grim, gray weather of fall and winter, young Bruno finds escape by applying his fertile imagination to everything he experiences. Windstorms can come off as monstrously malevolent or apocalyptic in nature. The advance of nightfall in seasons of short days can come off as an invasion like an epidemic of death:

The pestilence of dusk spread everywhere treacherously and poisonously, moved from one thing to another, and whatever it touched decayed instantly, turned black, disintegrated into rotten wood. People fled from the dusk in quiet panic and suddenly leprosy was catching up with them, spilling onto their foreheads as a dark rash; they lost their faces, which fell off in great, shapeless patches

The mad dance of spring can be a delight to the boy, but sometimes its riot and pansexuality seems ominously out of control. The family garden has one end open to the sun and "full of the milk of the heavens and the airs", while at the other, darker end:

it turned surly and careless, letting itself go wild and unkempt, grew fierce with nettles, bustled with thistles, turned mangy with all sort of weeds ...

There it was no longer an orchard but a paroxysm of madness, an explosion of fury, a cynical shamelessness and debauchery. There, completely out of control, the barren burdock cabbage heads proliferated, opening the floodgates of their poison—enormous witches, disrobing in broad daylight, shedding their ample skirts, flinging them off one after another, until their puffed-up, rustling, tattered rags buried under themselves with their frantic layers the rambunctious bastard tribe.

Notice his technique of piling on one metaphor after another until your brain brims over trying to hold onto the vision. I got a lot of pleasure from the similar way Schulz elaborates some of the boy's fantasies one step at a time until, like with a rollercoaster, you go over the top into absurdity. For example, the boy tries to construct a conception of the world through study of his friend Rudolph's stamp collection:

Dark, ardent, full of festering love, I took in a parade of creation, marching land, shining processions that I saw in intervals through purple eclipses, deafened by the blows of the blood beating in my heart in time to this universal march of all nations.

He wonders about the nobility and refinement of the mind of Franz Josef I, Emperor of Austria-Hungary, basks in the exotic colors of the flora and fauna in stamps from tropical paradises, and imagines intrigue behind the emperor's brother Maximilian getting posted to Mexico by Bonaparte as royal governor and later execution by the revolutionaries. At age 10, the boy is developing a crush on a mysterious rich girl his age,

Bianka, and projects all kinds of virtue behind her apparently surly reserve. An encounter with her at a wax museum display featuring the royal brothers leads him to imagine her as a bastard child of Maximillian by a Mexican mistress and in need of a brave intervention on his part worthy of Victor Hugo. I had lots of fun with this ornate tale whipped up out of the boy's and Schulz's fantasies.

The several tales about the obsessions of boy's father Jakub were the source of my greatest pleasure, almost Thurberesque in their little surprises and charm. His joining the fire brigade hobby leads Jakub to bringing his buddies home to hang out, and much drinking and horseplay ensues. The housekeeper Adela always finds a way to curb Jakub's excesses, such as driving him to retreat by threatening to tickle him. In the case of his father's hatching of a diverse collection of bird eggs and turning his attic into a bizarre aviary the boy initially gives his exuberant support. He trips out on the exotic colors and life that the birds bring to their grey lives in fall and winter. But soon his father begins compulsively to mimic his charges, such as flapping his virtual wings and croaking at the dinner table before catching himself in embarrassment. The apparent slippage of his father toward madness gets a reprieve when Adela manages to let the birds escape. Similarly, the son is captivated by his father's forays into weird philosophy, which is described as an attempt at "the grafting of mesmerism on the body of modern physics." Although their Jewishness is not much on display, I got the impression of the hazards of dwelling on the Kabbala and myths of golem creation in his goal for "the second generation of creatures that was to stand in open opposition to the present era. ...our creations will be provisional as it were, constructed for a single use". The boy is easily seduced by this riff of his father's:

"The Demiurge," said my father, "had no monopoly on creation; creation is a privilege of all spirits. Matter has infinite fecundity, an inexhaustible vital force, and, at the same time, a seductive power of temptation that entices us to create forms. In the depths of matter indistinct smiles take shape, tensions are reinforced, experimental shapes solidify. All matter flows from the infinite possibilities passing through it in faint shivers. All matter flows awaiting the life-giving breath of the spirit, it overflows endlessly within itself, temps with a thousand sweet curves and the softness it hallucinates in its blind imaginings. There is no dead matter ...lifelessness is only one eternal appearance behind which unknown forms of life are hiding.

...

He was fascinated with boundary forms, uncertain and problematic, like the ectoplasm of somnambulists, pseudomatter; the cataleptic emanation of the brain that in certain instances grew out of the mouth of a sleeping person into an entire table and filled an entire room, like a lushly expanding tissue, an astral dough on the border between body and soul.

Delightful nonsense. His father's mental reach in his conception of reviving the Age of Genius begins to look like Schulz dream behind the stories themselves, as eloquently described in the David Grossman piece mentioned above as "a period of perfect childhood, feral and filled with light, which even if it lasted for only a brief moment in a person's life would be missed for the rest of his years". In Jakub's language:

Here occurs the phenomenon of representation and vicarious life. Some event, perhaps minor and modest with regard to its provenance and its own means, may, when brought close to the eye, reveal in its interior an infinite, radiant perspective thanks to the higher being attempting to express itself and fiercely blazing within it.

And so we will gather those allusions, those earthly approximations, those stations and stages on the roads of our life, like the shards of a shattered mirror. We will gather piece by piece that which is whole and indivisible, our great age, the age of genius of our life.

Even at a toddler age the son suspects his father is keeping from his purview a special book, "The Book",

which contains the secrets of “magnificence beyond reckoning.” He finds at one point the remnants of a catalog of fashion, huckster schemes, and miraculous medical schemes and treatments which he believes to be fragments of this book. This frame of view leads him in his decoding efforts to quite a few odd and touching inferences in the form of life lessons and perspectives on the reality run by adults. Things turn darker when his father’s horror of cockroaches sends him around the bend. We witness a bit of an alternative to Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, where the conversion (once to a cockroach and in another piece into a crab) is rendered from the perspective of the neglectful family instead of an interior view. Quite a masterpiece of comic horror.

His father’s brilliant madness achieves an apotheosis in the story with the catchy title “The Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass.” The grown-up son visits him there where it seems that one version of his father is thriving and cheating death. The doctor in charge explains:

The entire trick depends ... on the fact that we have turned back time. ... Here, your father’s death, the death that already reached him in your fatherland, has simply not taken effect.

Schulz’s most well-known story, “The Street of Crocodiles,” was not a favorite for me. It’s an extended conception of a large city with a quarter taken over by rampant American-style commercialism and corruption. It appears rather featureless on maps and contains streets somehow devoid of most color (which I didn’t get given an expectation of crass advertising). Those who wander there at first experience a special freedom, but eventually the unreal logic of the place sinks in with a *Twilight Zone* gothcha:

...the fatal flaw in this quarter is that nothing in it is ever realized, nothing reaches its definitivum, all movements that are initiated are exhausted prematurely and cannot proceed beyond a certain dead end.

...The Street of Crocodiles was our city’s concession to modernity and metropolitan depravity.

Over 90% of the collection was outstanding to me, so I urge most readers to give this master a chance to spin your head around. The book was provided for review by the publisher through the Netgalley program.

Self portrait

Keith Chawgo says

Collected Stories is one of those collections that keep literary reviewers and prestigious literary journals buzzing with over excitement. Whether it is his collection of ‘Street of Crocodiles’ or the later collection ‘Sanatorium under the Sign of an Hourglass’, Schulz work is very well recognised within the upper brow annuals of literary fiction.

Keeping this mind, I personally tend to find difficulties reading this type of work as it is supposed to be the cream of the crop and held to such a high level that often times, the work does not stand up to the praise. I can safely say that with this collection of stories and the writing of Bruno Schulz, this most definitely lives up to its reputation.

Schulz’s writing style borders on extreme beauty and surrealism and he balances these to create an incredible body of work. The writing style is not short and sweet and he places his structuring, at times long winded, which to the modern novelist reader, can seem a bit out of sync but if you open your mind and let it wash over you, I think you would be presently surprised.

The work is a translation from the original Polish text and at times I often wonder how much of the writing is in the style of Schulz's writing and how much of it has been flourished with English prose. As I don't read Polish, I looked at the stories as the way that they are written. Looking at them from this view point, there are times that the descriptive text seems to be over flourished but this really doesn't take away from the over enjoyment of the stories found within.

Overall, I would not suggest reading these in one go. This collection of stories works best reading it in parts. Read a story, walk away and read something else and you will find that each individual tale will stay ingrained within your subconscious. Your brain will be returning to them time and time again. The writing style will not be for everyone but if you are in love with the written word, there is plenty to feast your mind on. Take a chance and you will not be disappointed.

Joseph says

Collected Stories by Bruno Schulz is a collection of short stories comprised of two published works and additional uncollected stories. Schulz was a Polish Jewish writer, fine artist, literary critic and art teacher. He is regarded as one of the great Polish-language prose stylists of the 20th century. In 1938, he was awarded the Polish Academy of Literature's prestigious Golden Laurel award.

There are two things that make this collection great. The first is the writing style. Schulz is perhaps the only readily known Polish modernist in the West. It takes only a short time before the reader is drawn into the minds of the characters. The settings gain importance over the concept of plot and are rich in imagery. The imagery is not only found in the great things but also in the mundane like fish in aspic. The characters get the same treatment:

What remained of him was a small amount of corporeal casing and that handful of senseless eccentricities—they could disappear one day, as unnoticed as the gray pile of trash collecting in a corner that Adela carried out every day to the garbage bin.

The second thing that makes this collection significant is the translation work by Madeline G. Levine. Levine is Kenan Professor of Slavic Literatures Emerita at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Her translations from Polish include *The Woman from Hamburg and Other True Stories* by Hanna Krall, *Bread for the Departed* by Bogdan Wojdowski, and four volumes of prose by Czesław Miłosz. The introduction documents the checking and rechecking by another party of the translation. The goal is to capture the essence and accuracy of the original language. The proper use of translation, even if sometimes unwieldy in English or using words that are not in common use, like hill-lock hump, adds depth and accuracy to reading and concentrates the reader's effort and attention.

Collected Stories offers the reader a look inside of Polish fiction of the modernist period. There are many similarities in the writing to Woolf's later poetic prose. Stream of consciousness plays out through the stories. As many of the stories take place in the past, the effects of memory play an important role in the storytelling much like in Proust. Talking to an acquaintance who was born and raised in Poland, Schulz is wonderful and read by most in high school. After reading this collection, I would definitely agree with the wonderful.

Fran says

DNF. A family of four lived in a dark, shaded apartment with wallpaper yellowed from the excessive summer heat. The dimly lit apartment, above their dressmaking business, was in a state of neglect. The father's health deteriorated as he experienced loss of his mental faculties. He conversed with himself, was often agitated and sometimes became glazed over like an automaton. The metaphors, although excellent, were not enough to help maintain my interest level in continuing to read and fairly assess this tome. It would be unfair to rate "Collected Stories" by Bruno Schulz, a book I did not finish.

Thank you Northwestern University Press and Net Galley for the opportunity to read and review "Collected Stories".

peg says

I became aware of Bruno Schultz while reading *The Messiah of Stockholm* by Cynthia Ozik and decided to read the works of this seemingly obscure author. Schultz's work contains some of the most beautiful prose I have ever read. I don't understand why this author is not more widely known. I read it slowly, savoring the language and enjoying the stories as told by this exceptional Jewish holocaust victim. Thank goodness for writers like Cynthia Ozik whose goal it is to expose great but little-known authors!

Paul Fulcher says

Duplicate streets, doppelganger streets, lying and deceptive streets, so to speak, reveal themselves in the depths of the city.
from *The Cinnamon Shops*

Fans of China Mieville's *The City and The City* (I'm not one! - see <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>) will recognise that quote, in a slightly different translation by John Curran Davis, as the epigraph and perhaps the inspiration of that novel.

And Mieville joins a long list of authors with an acknowledged debt to Bruno Schulz in their work, borrowing quotations, characters, aspects of his life (in addition to the undoubted many on whom his influence is less explicitly noted) such as:

- 2017 MBI winning David Grossman - whose *See Under: Love* is based around the story of Schulz's death (under the protection of one Gestapo officer in occupied Poland, he was shot in the street by a rival officer), except in his novel the narrator helps him escape his fate by turning him into a salmon
- the legendary Roberto Bolaño: the narrator of his *Distant Star* reads Schulz's work during the story
- Booker of Booker winning Salman Rushdie, whose *Moor's Last Sigh* recreates Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles* but in Andalusia:

I felt as if I were in some sort of interregnum, in some timeless zone under the sign of an hourglass in which the sand stood motionless, or a clepsydra whose quicksilver had ceased to flow. [...] I wandered down

sausage-festooned streets of bakeries and cinnamon shops, smelling, instead, the sweet scents of meat and pastries and fresh-baked bread, and surrendered myself to the cryptic laws of the town.

(Rushdie: The Moor's Last Sigh)

- Danilo Kiš whose "family trilogy" owes a large debt to Schulz ("Schulz is my God" he told John Updike): e.g. the title of the last of the trilogy Hourglass rather echoes Schulz's Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass and his Treatise on the Potato therein Schulz' Treatise on Tailors' Dummies

- Jonathan Safran Foer whose Tree of Codes is formed from cutting up his favourite book of all - Schulz's Street of Crocodiles (the words Tree of Codes can be made from a subset of the letters in Street of Crocodiles)

as well as others such as Cynthia Ozick (The Messiah of Stockholm), Philip Roth (the Czech author in The Prague Orgy is essentially Schulz) and Nicole Krauss (The History of Love).

(see <http://jewishquarterly.org/2011/06/ap...> for a more detailed survey)

Several of those books are based on the legend of Schulz's lost work, The Messiah, a work some scholars believe perhaps never existed. But what we have heard is the work that Schulz did complete in his brief lifetime - the two story collections The Cinnamon Streets & Other Stories (the original English language publisher chose to present it under the title of another story, The Street of Crocodiles, against the translator's wishes) and Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass, as well as some miscellanea.

The lazy reviewers guide to Bruno Schulz would be Witold Gombrowicz meets Franz Kafka, and it is not hard to apparently see the influence of the latter, particularly in The Cinnamon Shops collection:

Many of the stories concern his increasingly eccentric father, who first develops a mania for birds which starts with collecting and incubating rare eggs, but ends with him taking on avian-like characteristics himself, then becomes obsessed with cockroaches, again starting to resemble one himself (*my father was turning into a cockroach*). Querying his father's absence, the narrator asks his mother whether his father is now one of the cockroaches in the house, or perhaps instead the stuffed condor, the last remnant of his avian obsession, although his mother retorts: *I already told you that father is travelling about the country as a travelling salesman.*

Or in the labyrinth corridors of the family home, rooms that disappear or come literally alive, and also the confusion of the city's streets (see the opening quotes) or houses:

Having entered the wrong vestibule and the wrong stairwell, one usually wound up in a veritable labyrinth of unfamiliar apartments and passageways, unexpected exits into unfamiliar courtyards, and one forgot the original goal of the expedition, until, many days later, while returning on some grey dawn from the uncharted territories of strange, matted adventures, one remembered amid pangs of conscience one's family home.

But to spoil the story, while Schulz was to translate Kafka into Polish, he apparently only read Kafka after he was sent a copy to review following the publication of The Cinnamon Shops. One can instead perhaps, equally lazily, suggest they drew on the same (post) Austro-Hungarian empire world of bureaucracy breaking down and mitteleuropean melancholia.

The reality is that Schulz has a surreal style all of his own - one that I can admire sometimes more than

appreciate. The narrator's of Distant Star (see above) sums the effect up well: "The words went scuttling past like beetles, busy at incomprehensible tasks."

I read Schulz's works in 2004, and again a few years later. The reason for revisiting them now is the publication of a new translation by Madeline Levine, the original works having been brought into English in the 1960-1970s by Celina Wieniewska.

I'm not, as a rule, a massive fan of retranslations of classic works. There is far too much great but untranslated literature that would better command an enthusiastic translator's attention, and much retranslation does seem to be nitpicking with the original - the occasional case where the original was badly flawed tends to be the exception rather than the rule.

Here I was pleased to see that Levine praises the 'undeniable magic of Wieniewska's English version.' She justifies retranslation generally on the grounds that "the richer the original, the more interpretations it can sustain. Translation is both a scholarly art and a performance,' which is fair enough but still leaves my concern with efficient use of translation resources.

Specifically, she argues that while her predecessor 'intended to convey the visual images and bizarre events that distinguish Schulz's stories,' she did this by 'taming his prose.' Levine's aim is to 'get closer to the texture of Schulz's prose by stretching English syntax to make it accommodate the sinousity of Schulz's longer sentences rather than reigning them in,' and also to closer mirror Schulz's repetition and alliteration and the use, as much as possible, of the prefix dis- (mirroring an equivalent Polish term).

I must admit I struggled, comparing the translations side by side, to detect such a significant difference, other perhaps than Levine drawing on a richer English vocabulary. Compare for example the literally labyrinthine sentence above to Wieniewska's version.

For, once you had entered the wrong doorway and set foot on the wrong staircase, you were liable to find oneself in a real labyrinth of unfamiliar apartments and balconies, and unexpected doors opening onto strange empty courtyards, and you forgot the initial object of the expedition, only to recall it days later after numerous strange and complicated adventures, on regaining the family home in the grey light of dawn.

See this for a further discussion: <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog...>

And see also Curran Davis on the reason he did a retranslation <http://weirdfictionreview.com/2012/01...>

So overall Schulz is an author one ought to read if only for his profound influence on others. This translation will likely become the new standard, but I wouldn't particularly recommend it as a vital choice over the existing one.

Thanks to the publisher via Netgalley for the ARC.

Teresa says

4.75

This is like nothing I've read before. Take Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust and Jorge Luis Borges; shake them

up; rearrange the splinters into a collage of expressionism; and still this is like nothing I've read before.

A father becomes a cockroach, a large bird, a crustacean; an aunt burns in a fit of anger into a pile of ashes. The young narrator remembers a book, the Book of all Books, from when he was even younger and despairs at his family's cavalier attitude when he discovers its fate. A postage-stamp album is the entryway into a life of love, war, jealousy and sacrifice. Death exists at the same time it is delayed. Mirrors don't merely reflect: they hint at the other worlds they contain. Old men soar above the ground as if they are in a Chagall painting.

The stories do not stop when the characters fall asleep, only to pick up again when they awake. Instead, the rooms of the house expand; the walls, curtains and furniture pulsate; the minds of the sleepers reach out to one another or across the city, except when they don't. In many cases the active sleeping *is* the eventful climax of a story.

Above all, it is the language that delights. Within an elegant structure of sentences, the imagery invokes all the senses so plentifully that every yellow horizon, every crack between buildings, every single *thing*, is alive.

To quote the old-age pensioner:

It is part of my existence to be the parasite of metaphors, so easily am I carried away by the first simile that comes along. Having been carried away, I have to find my difficult way back, and slowly return to my senses.

Always with full use of his senses, Schulz may at times drop the similes, but never the metaphors.

Leanna says

Another book that came up in two of my classes this semester. Bruno Schulz (1892-1942) was a Polish writer. His output was not huge (he was gunned down during World War II) and mainly consisted of two collections of short stories: "The Street of the Crocodiles" and "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass." Both take Schulz's childhood as the focal point and both deeply reimagine it. I guess you could call Schulz's style magical realism. For example, during the course of the two collections, the Father character turns into a stuffed condor, a cockroach, a dragonfly, and a crab. During Schulz's childhood, his father, owner of a textile shop, was ill and languished for years. So in Schulz's collections, his father keeps appearing, disappearing, living, dying, and transforming. It's fascinating. Also fascinating is how Schulz stays with just one cast of characters (the avatar for his childhood self, the Mother character, the Father character, the saucy servant girl, Adela) through both story collections, revisiting again and again his childhood through fantastical metaphors, images, and dream-realities (besides the father's transformations, streets and seasons have their own personalities; an uncle turns into a bell; a crush on a schoolgirl is told through a strange lens of stampbooks and wax dummies, etc).

So, I loved the obsessive focus on the domestic sphere, childhood, and family. Schulz creates huge, beautiful mythologies out of these very simple elements. What I loved most, though, was the language! Schulz's language can be lushly poetic, also very funny and insightful, and is ripe (so ripe it's practically swollen!) with metaphor.

Cons--every now and then the descriptive language went on for too long. And sometimes the events of the stories were too confusing. I preferred the collection of "Street of the Crocodiles" to that of "Hour of the

Sanatorium”—I found the first clearer and tighter.

I'll just excerpt a few examples of the beautiful, imaginative language:

describing a man sleeping: "Groping blindly in the darkness, he sank between the white mounds of cool feathers and slept as he fell, across the bed or with his head downwards, pushing deep into the softness of the pillows, as if in sleep he wanted to drill through, to explore completely, that powerful massif of feather-bedding rising out of the night. He fought in his sleep against the bed like a bather swimming against the current, he kneaded it and moulded it with his body like an enormous bowl of dough, and woke up at dawn panting, covered with sweat, thrown up on the shores of that pile of bedding which he could not master in the nightly struggle. Half landed in the depth of unconsciousness, he still hung onto the verge of night, gasping for breath, while the bedding grew around him, swelled, and fermented—and again engulfed him in a mountain of heavy, whitish dough."

describing a sheaf of peacock feathers: "These feathers were a dangerous, frivolous element, hiding rebelliousness, like a class of naughty schoolgirls who are quiet and composed in appearance, but full of mischief when no longer watched. The eyes of those feathers never stopped staring; they made holes in the walls, winking, fluttering their eyelashes, smiling to one another, giggling and full of mirth."

"...Each crevice suddenly produced a cockroach, from every chink would shoot a crazy black zigzag of lightning."

(well, this I found just funny, and true--describing a puppy) "He had the dejected helplessness of an orphan--an inability to fill the emptiness of life between the sensational events of meals."
